



Health

Program drums up praise



A PROGRAM designed to help Aboriginal people deal with mental health issues has attracted international attention.

Called Drumbeat, the program was developed by drug and alcohol counselling and support service, Holyoake, initially with input from Aboriginal advisers in Western Australia's Wheatbelt almost a decade ago. It is now used across Australia.

"Drumbeat is already being used throughout Australia, and more recently it has attracted serious attention in the United States," Holyoake chief executive Angie

Paskevicius said.

"The results from a trial in seven WA prisons prove it is quite revolutionary in the mental health area in that there were improvements in positive mental health wellbeing as well as reduced psychological distress among

many of the prisoners who took part.

"Holyoake has received numerous

inquiries from all over the world about Drumbeat and the results of an independent evaluation of this trial are so compelling that we now feel a sense of urgency in taking the program to wherever there are people in need of its mental health benefits.

"We have known for quite some time that Drumbeat can achieve outstanding results with many people of all age groups who are experiencing mental health issues – the program has been evaluated in other settings such as schools and aged-care facilities and it has received awards.

"However, the research into the use of Drumbeat in prisons is a world first and to obtain these results with prisoners who often experience poor

mental wellbeing is very exciting."

A research team led by Associate Professor Lisa Wood and Assistant Professor Karen Martin, based at the University of WA's School of Population Health, recently completed

a nine-month evaluation of a trial of the Holyoake Drumbeat program in Acacia, Bandyup, Boronia, Bunbury, Casuarina, Karnet and Woorlooloo prisons.

Results showed that among prisoners who took part in Drumbeat sessions there were significant mental health improvements as well as increased resilience. In the prisoners able to be followed up three months later, mental wellbeing was still improved. The study

also found that prisoners enjoyed the interactive nature of the program, and developed teamwork, communication and relationship skills in the process.

Drumbeat stands for Discovering Relationships Using Music – Beliefs, Emotions, Attitudes and Thoughts. It involves group sessions with a facilitator encouraging participants to work together and develop skills central to



healthy relationships. The hand drumming assists with shifting the focus away from the therapy and allows participants to feel safe in a way not generally available in traditional programs dominated by direct questioning.

Holyoake developed the Drumbeat concept in 2003, initially to engage Aboriginal youth in the Wheatbelt region to strengthen their resilience to drug and alcohol use.

Over the past decade, the use of Drumbeat has expanded to all Australian states in settings including schools, mental health clinics, youth services and drug rehabilitation centres.

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